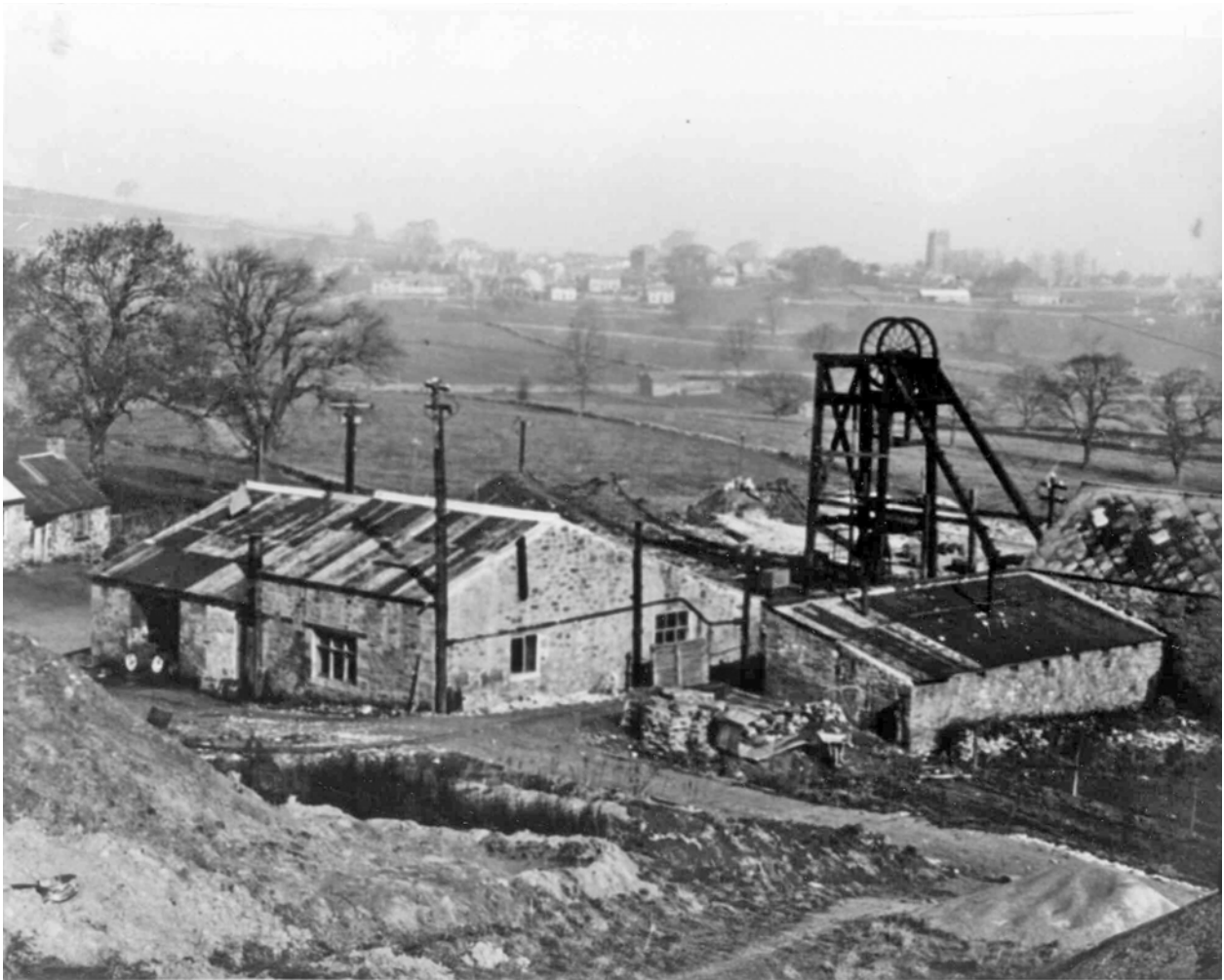


# The Mawstone Mine Disaster

*“Heroism unsurpassed in the history of mining”*



By Andrew McCloy and Norman Wilson

 **The Bugle** 

This commemorative publication is dedicated to the  
eight men who lost their lives in the Mawstone Mine  
Disaster, Youlgrave, Derbyshire, 23rd May 1932.

John William Birds (aged 24)

William Brindley (aged 22)

John Eric Evans (aged 23)

John Gallagher (aged 33)

William Geoffrey Gould (aged 28)

James Porter (aged 27)

Poultney Porter (aged 57)

Kenneth Seville (aged 34)

“Greater love hath no man than this,  
to lay down his life for his friends.”

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Published by The Bugle, Youlgrave's monthly community magazine  
Englemere, Brookleton, Youlgrave, Derbyshire DE45 1UT [www.thebugle.org.uk](http://www.thebugle.org.uk)

Printed by Ashbourne Secretarial and Printing Services (tel 01335 300445)

The Bugle would like to thank the following people, organisations and companies for their generous donations that made this publication possible:

**Derbyshire Aggregates Ltd**  
**Nicholas Davie-Thornhill**  
**The Duke of Devonshire**  
**Peter Knowles**  
**Long Rake Spar Co. Ltd**  
**Lord Edward Manners**  
**Peak District National Park Authority**  
**Ken Seville**  
**Youlgrave Parish Council**  
**Youlgrave Welldressers**

We would also like to thank all those who have helped us research and prepare this document, including Lisa Lovell, Debbie Porter, Ken Seville, Robin Stacey, Jean Whittaker and the staff at Derbyshire County Council Local Studies Library. Special thanks to Terry Worthington, the current owner of Mawstone Mine.

Please note: Mawstone Mine is  
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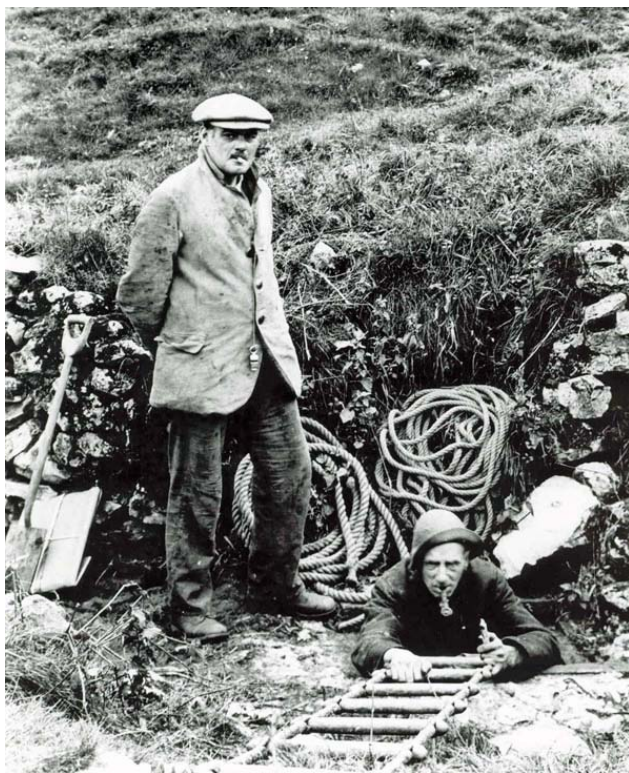
## Part 1: Youlgrave – lead mining and the community

### Making the best of ‘bad ground’

Mawstone Mine was one of numerous lead mines once common across the limestone uplands of north and west Derbyshire. Mined since Roman times, Britain was Europe’s main source of lead until the 19th century, and as the Peak District was one of the principal orefields it meant that lead mining had a key economic impact on the region. Mines such as Mawstone were a major source of employment for the men of Youlgrave, especially in the Depression years of the 1930s. Indeed, the population of small communities rose and fell with the fortunes of local mining and whether, for instance, a new level or sough (underground drainage channel) was being driven.

At its height, the mining of lead created an industrial scene very different to the largely rural landscape we see today; but it also had a unique social set-up with its own peculiar expressions and phrases, as well as its own special jurisdiction (the Barmote Court). By the 20th century, however, the industry was in terminal decline as cheaper sources of lead from abroad became available.

Mawstone Mine, or Shining Gutter as it was also known, is located half a mile south of Youlgrave, from where the majority of its miners were drawn. Mining was a highly speculative and risky business in more ways than one, and there were plenty of short-lived



*Miners exploring a local shaft.*

companies that hoped to get rich quick, but all too soon ended up bust. Not for nothing were miners sometime called ‘adventurers’. The Mawstone (or Mosstone) Mine Company first began exploration locally in the 1880s, but before long it was in liquidation – a situation repeated more than once, as the fortunes of the company fluctuated almost from year to year. The Bradford Vale Mining Company was formed in 1919 to work the mine, but it too struggled to find a profitable vein of lead ore. Perhaps best known in the wider area was the Alport Mining Company, which at one point had what was reckoned to be the largest working smelter in Europe.

It’s hard for us today to envisage what it must have been like to work in dark, wet and cramped conditions deep underground for hour upon hour. Even though coal mining and the Cornish tin industry were supposedly more risky in terms of

accidents and fatalities, lead mining was nevertheless an unpleasant, difficult and hazardous business. In some lead mines, such as Mawstone and Mill Close (north of Wensley and Darley Bridge), there was a danger from lethal and inflammable gas. Indeed, Mawstone was more prone than most, since the workings ran through a deposit of shale which increased the likelihood of the build-up of gas. Of particular concern at Mawstone was 'firedamp', which was known to exist in the mine. Firedamp is an inflammable gas found underground that consists of methane. In the early years of modern mining there had been plenty of accidents and fatalities involving firedamp, as a simple spark could ignite to cause an explosion.

Water was a perennial problem for all lead mines, not just Mawstone, and constant pumping was necessary to drain the mines and keep them

clear to work. Elaborate drainage systems were constructed to 'de-water' the mines, the most notable being Hillcarr Sough. This 4½-mile underground drainage tunnel, the longest in Derbyshire, was driven deep below Stanton Moor and issued out into the Derwent valley. When finally connected to Hillcarr Sough, Mawstone became the furthest point on what was a massive underground drainage network.

At the time of the accident, an exploratory level was being driven from Mawstone Mine towards Gratton Dale, in the hope of reaching what was believed to be a potentially rich vein of ore called Coast Rake. It was one of the few largely unexplored sections of the Derbyshire lead field, not least because of the difficulty of penetrating the overlying shale. The miners, slowly forcing their way through this problematic rock, referred to it by a particularly appropriate term – they called it 'bad ground'. Mawstone Mine had bad ground in abundance.

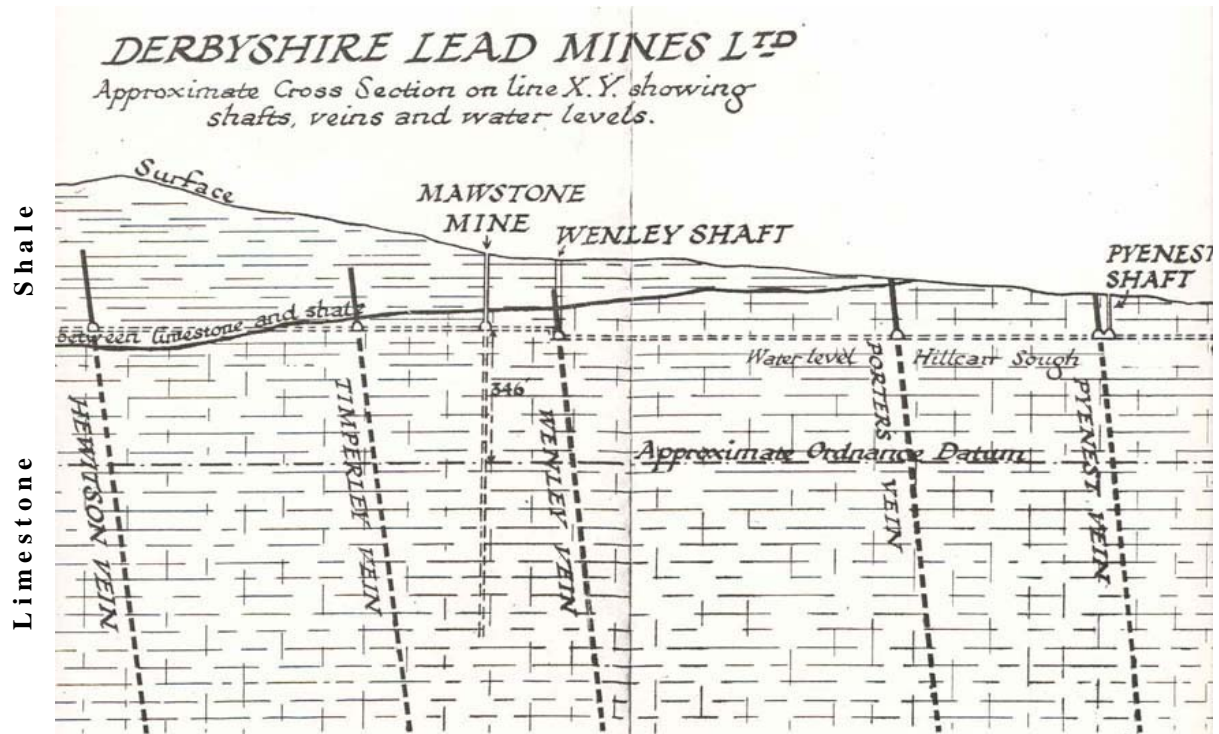


*The mine face at Mawstone.*

## **Mawstone Mine in 1932**

Contemporary photographs, such as the one on the front cover, give some idea of what Mawstone Mine was like 75 years ago. Looking across from Youlgrave, you would have seen a cluster of buildings dotted around the familiar winding gear and legs that stood over the entrance to the solitary 8 x 6 ft oval shaft. Joined on to the winding structure was a small





*This cross section diagram from the 1930s shows the problem of the overlying shale at Mawstone Mine.*

building known as the miners' dry, where the men would change. Further away, on its own in a field, was the explosives magazine. To the right of the wooden headgear was a large shed which would have housed the generator used to power the electric winder. At the far side was the Mine Manager's office and blacksmith, while further down the hillside from the shaft head was the spoil tip.

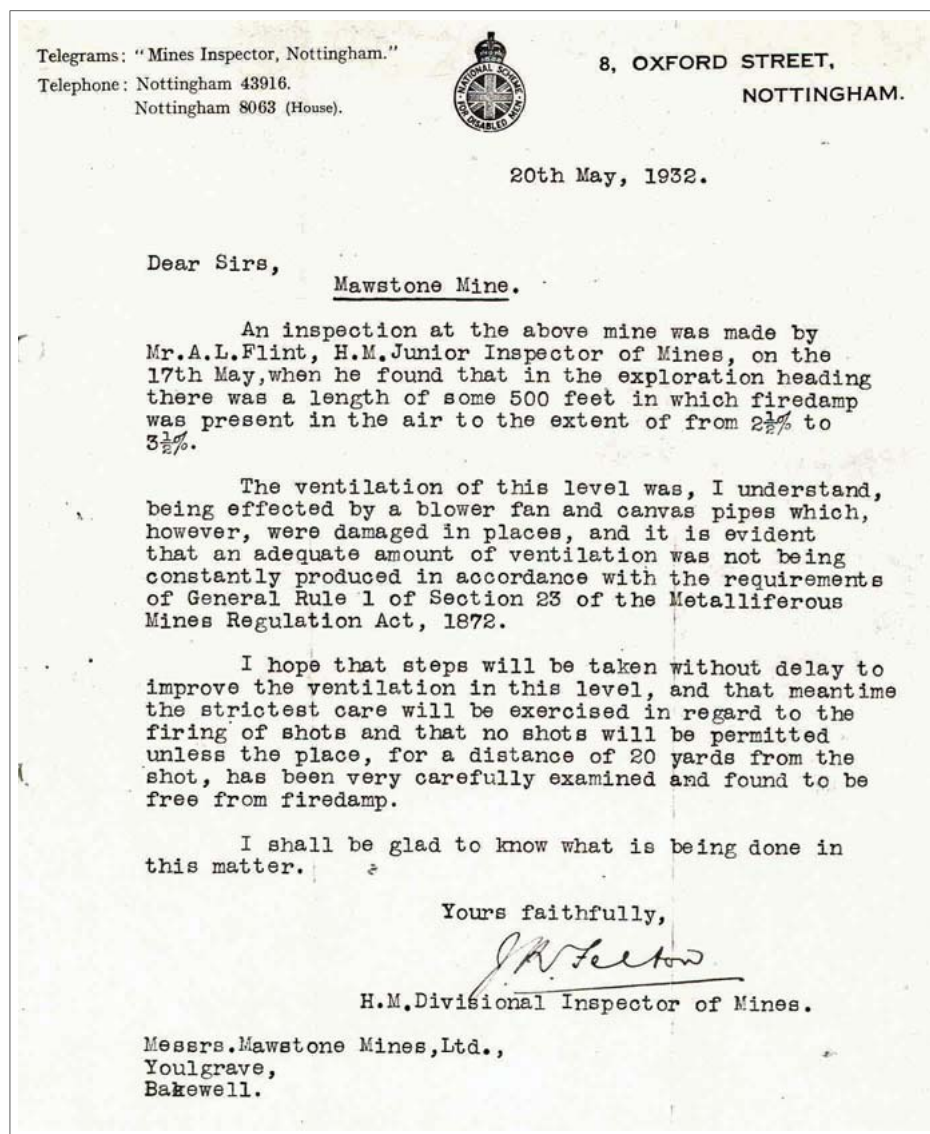
Two tiny cages lowered the men down the 150 ft shaft, four miners to a cage, while tubs or small wagons were used for moving the galena (lead ore). At the time of the accident there were 32 miners on the payroll (some newspaper reports gave a lower figure), with shifts of eight men working round the clock – but, along with the mine's fortunes, numbers fluctuated.

In the decade before 1932, work to improve drainage meant that mining at Mawstone was interrupted; but immediately prior to the accident it was the new level being driven towards Gratton Dale that was the focus of the miners' efforts. This involved nine months of unproductive work driving through the difficult and gas-bearing shale. However, at the time of the accident, all work had ceased and improvements to ventilation were taking place. This is likely to have been in response to a letter from the Divisional Inspector of Mines on 20th May, following a visit a few days earlier, which found that unacceptably high levels of firedamp were present in Mawstone Mine. The letter (see page 6) stated that there was inadequate ventilation and pointed out that canvas pipes servicing the blower fan had been found to be defective.

Since 1932, there has inevitably been some speculation that corners were being cut in an attempt to speed up work on the new level. Were profits and not the miners' safety

uppermost in the management's mind? It was known that Mawstone was a difficult mine – in terms of working the ore and the dangers of gas – and that mining was an inherently hazardous business. It's also clear from the Mines Inspector's letter that there were shortcomings identified immediately prior to the accident – but, crucially, they were in the process of being rectified when the explosion occurred. Of course, the Mawstone Mine Company and its professional manager were ambitious and businesslike; but since the miners themselves were on bonuses it's likely that they, too, were keen to get on with things.

It's only natural that following a disaster like Mawstone, when people are shocked and angry, a culprit has to be found. But it does seem that the accident at Mawstone Mine was almost certainly just that – a terrible tragedy that took place due to a combination of factors, a fateful moment that shook a small Derbyshire community to the core. So what was Youlgrave like in 1932 and how did its people react to this event?



*Letter from the Divisional Inspector of Mines, three days before the tragedy. The safety level for firedamp present in the air below ground (first paragraph) is 1%.*

## **The way we were**

I have a childhood memory that neither fading years nor the encroachment of lifetime events has managed to obscure. It is a memory of meeting the Bradford lead miners by the allotments in Mawstone Lane, where the council-built houses now stand, on their way home from their shift at Shining Gutter mine. And there I am, a six-year-old roaming freely as we children then were allowed to do, turning back to stride along with them as their companion. Some were wonderfully dishevelled, wet, caked in yellow clay, going home in a state that would have terrified me. But they were kind and cheerful, despite their condition, and I was their friend. Little did we know that two were soon to die as heroes and one was barely to survive.

The memory is not just a sort of action replay of a few minutes in the game of life. It takes me back, as they say. It exists, insofar as an infant could perceive it, within the context of its time, unshaded by the social changes in the village then and now. It allows me to think back and reflect on the way we lived with each other, our horizons and the aspirations of our time. The trauma and disruption of the Great War had gone, the upheaval of World War II was yet to come, and Youlgrave had settled into its natural, inwardly-looking state of self-containment, close-neighbourliness and familiarity of people and places. Youlgrave in the 1930s was not just a place to live; it was a coherent, if not always harmonious, community whose sense of identity was most evident in inter-village rivalry. A man from Birchover who married a Youlgrave girl almost a hundred years ago, told me that when he was courting he had no trouble getting in to see her – but he had to be prepared to fight his way out.

It was a working village without pretensions or expectations and everybody knew each other. There were few skeletons that were kept secret in the cupboard for long, so the worth of most people and families was measured by respectability (now fashionably considered unenlightened and judgmental) and the good neighbourliness that in these days of self-sufficiency and independence is neither imperative nor understood. Yet, without an understanding of this bygone commitment to each other, of loyalty to families and friends, there can be no explanation why, on 23rd May 1932, the country had cause to wonder at the heroism of the Youlgrave miners. There was a fatal accident, the history of which is a matter of record for which posterity will need no causal interpretation; not so the village spirit that responded to it. Times change and society is fast moving on.

Have we left it too late? Alas, after 75 years there is no survivor left to tell us at first-hand about the men he sought to rescue and what drove him to try. Word of mouth and surmise are not the best instruments with which to assemble a time capsule, but it will soon be too late even for these. It is right for us to present what we know and leave posterity to its own conclusions.

In 1932, Stoneyside was my home and Bradford encompassed my world. I seldom met someone I didn't know and, looking back, I can see I was privileged to be part of an ordered community where propriety and privacy were finely balanced against concern for each other. There was a custom which puzzled me at the time but which I can now see as the epitome of the unwritten code that allowed us to stand so close to each other. If a wife fell ill, perhaps confined to bed, a self-appointed surrogate would promptly step in. She would arrive, take off her coat, put on her apron and leave her hat on her head as she worked. Why the hat? I think it was saying: "Don't worry, I know my place and I won't intrude. I will not hang





*Mawstone Quarry, near the site of the mine (photo courtesy of Peggy Bacon).*

about once the work is done.” *Kind* and *considerate* are words often linked in tribute to an individual. I would use them to describe the Bradford I knew.

It may be claimed, quite rightly, that this instinctive neighbourliness is no less heartfelt today. True enough: what has changed is the capacity to give expression to it. There are powerful distractions keeping us apart that didn’t then exist. Housewives mostly stayed at home; men travelled to work on buses or bicycles, not isolated in cars; there were neither television nor computers to keep us indoors; the village school, where children remained till 14, was an integral part of social assimilation, an induction to village obligations. Quite simply, we had more time for each other. And the downside of that is that, when tragedy came, it came to someone you knew. Grief, like happiness, was shared.

I can think of no more mournful sound than the Passing Bell of old, tolling its muffled tale of mortality. Homes were stilled, curtains were drawn and people stood hatless with respect as the cortege went by. To imagine this solemnity multiplied by disaster, is to have some inkling of the scene on 27th May, 1932 when Youlgrave said goodbye to its tragic miners.

Another feature of life on Bradford, which I later came to realise was a narrow view of the whole village, was its self-containment. Many of the elderly people I knew had never seen the sea and now never would. I knew a man who had seen war service abroad, settled down and, when he died, had yet to visit Stanton-in-Peak. We could comfortably stay where we were, hence no need to disrupt the links of fellowship. True, we lacked some facilities that are now thought indispensable to comfort, such as gas and electricity, but we gathered round our oil lamps after dark and lit our way to bed with candles. Almost everything we needed was brought to the door. Mr Curtis came trundling down Stoneyside from Ashford in his high-sided truck, festooned with zinc baths and dolly tubs, to bring us paraffin and candles. He brought with him all the accessories of domestic fettling such as soap, black lead

(for the Yorkshire grate), donkey stones, shoe polish and disinfectant. Others came regularly with greengroceries, fish, coal, fruit, bread and beverages, and less regularly with things to wear. Mr Hardy lugged his suitcase from Darley Dale full of ladies stockings (and garments boys were not allowed to see) in the days before his enterprise grew into the DFS superstore. Now and again exotic gentlemen in turbans came unexpectedly to the door with much the same sort of thing. 'Travellers' from Ormes and from Burgons of Bakewell came to sit at the table and take the order. For housewives who baked their own bread, someone would come from Caudwell's Mill to arrange delivery of sacks of flour which would be kneaded with the yeast from a tray brought to the door by little Albie Cook from Over Haddon.

As I later learned, the whole village was similarly served and, despite this plethora of doorstep deliveries, there were in addition upwards of thirty places to go and buy things; granted some of them were cottage parlours converted to retail duty. If need be, the Hulley family would take you further afield to Bakewell for sixpence return, Jim Woolliscroft's Silver Service to Matlock and Peter Prince would take you wherever his taxi and your pocket allowed.

There were few private cars and those that ventured down Stoneyside had, more likely than not, lost their way. So people could meet in the street and pass the time of day uninterrupted. When a rare aeroplane went over we would rush out of the house to spot it. It was usually a small, brightly coloured monoplane and if it was red we would wisely pronounce: "Yes, that's a mail plane". They seemed so mysterious, so Olympian, until – great excitement – Alan Cobham brought his Flying Circus to a field where the new Lady Manners School was later to be built and I was taken to see these fabulous creatures in the flesh, so to speak.

Sundays were family days. The Playing Fields would be closed and patrolled by the keeper, the swings chained and the two bus bodies used for sheltering tennis players and children were shut. There were chapels to be filled, relations to visit and things to see. Families dressed in their Sunday best would walk out, meet and chat with other families in the lanes and paths that are now tramped by intent strangers kitted out with trekking poles, all-weather clothes, dangling map cases and the like. And, in the course of these strolls, the children were taught to observe and respect nature, to absorb the local history and to understand their responsibilities, particularly in relation to their neighbours. It was a part of the time-honoured induction to tribal awareness and duty to others.

Yet in other respects it was a male-segregated way of life. Boys grew into adolescence scorning (but secretly in awe of) girls and formed small gangs that often persisted into adulthood. It was not unusual to find a familiar band of young men taking their leisurely stroll in the countryside of a Sunday afternoon or, less visibly to be lurking in some hideaway to gamble illegally at brag. Bachelorhood seemed to be the preferred way of life (for some permanently), although most groups slowly disintegrated as members succumbed one by one to marriages willingly contracted, albeit in some cases hastened by the proverbial shotgun. By this time loyalties had been enduringly set and, in a way that today might be misunderstood, they were so devoted to each other's interests that, in the circumstances of shared danger such as mining, they would readily jeopardize their own.

Marriage, in fact, did little to diminish men's partiality for each other's company. They bonded formally in associations such as the Antedeluvian Order of Buffaloes and the Ancient Order of Foresters, proudly proclaiming their brotherhood with insignia, badges and

even, when rallied, in ritual costumes. No badges were more proudly worn than those of the British Legion whose members, yet to find a headquarters, paraded in force every year to commemorate those comrades whose loss had over four long years accustomed the village to grief. For the rest of the year they met regularly to renew the spirit of service and raise money for less fortunate survivors. Youlgrave in 1932 was no stranger to the concept of sacrifice before self.

Men habitually gravitated to each other's company. The Reading Room and the Village Hall annexe, populous temples of sobriety, were their exclusive domain. In the taprooms of the three pubs, where food was never served and venturesome women were frowned on, men who had probably toiled together all day assembled again in their leisure time to deny the claim that a change is as good as a rest.

Perhaps the most striking example of 'male togetherness', though few would recognize it as such, was the language in which familiar men conversed. Most, particularly the older end, spoke a pure dialect that, unmodified, would have been unintelligible to outsiders. It was so exclusive and special that, if you listened carefully, visitors – even from villages close by – could be identified by the words they used. Some words and phrases (of which *launder* and *sough* are still in use for eaves guttering and road gully) were borrowed from the mining vernacular; many, such as *sithe*, *sirree*, came straight from medieval parlance.

This cult of bonded males was the epitome of those who had fought together, daily faced danger together and, if necessary, would risk their lives for each other. So when the call came to rescue their friends and workmates from desperate peril in Mawstone Mine, they were already equipped to respond with no thought to their own safety. I don't think it



*Celebrating Jubilee Day in 1935 outside Youlgrave Village Hall.*

was a case of conscious heroism: they were impelled by their innate sense of duty and regard for each other.

We, too, have a duty to them.

I have another childhood memory that has been so replicated by Hollywood scenes that I can no longer be sure that what I remember is what I saw at Mawstone Mine on the evening of 23rd May 1932. What I do remember without question is the arrival of the grim-faced, purposeful men carrying their helmets and respirators from, it was said, Clay Cross. Mines Rescue was their business, a calling revealed in their demeanour as they strode directly to the pithead without a sideways glance. As for the rest – the drama, the anxious faces pointed in silent hope, the rescue party returning with the blanketed stretchers – it could all belong to ‘How Green was My Valley’. Perhaps it does, but there are better witnesses than a six-year-old boy.

Almost ten years later, two friends and I explored – trespassed I suppose – the mine yard and its buildings. In one of them – a rest area judging from the pot-bellied stove – hung jackets and overalls that had long been there. Could they have been left by men who could never return? It was a melancholy thought that brought tragedy back to life.

But by then we were at war again and there were other deaths to mourn. Or did we just forget?

### “Heroism unsurpassed in the history of mining”

The northern half of the county covered by the *Derbyshire Times*, then as now, was in 1932 no stranger to drama and tragedy in the mining industry. In a vastly different landscape, scores of coal mines employed more than 100,000 miners whose daily round was arguably the most dangerous occupation in the country and for whom calls to rescue trapped workmates were an all-too-frequent event. Yet this newspaper, familiar as it must have been with tales of valour, saw fit to label the courage of a few would-be rescuers in this out-of-the-way village of Youlgrave as “heroism unsurpassed in the history of mining”.

How did it come about? What impelled these modest villagers to set aside the most powerful human instinct of self-survival and embark on an expedition, hopeless though it was, to save the lives of their workmates at suicidal risk to their own? Happy-go-lucky **Eric Evans**, quietly-talented **Jack Birds**, dour **Herbert Wright**, industrious **Herbert Slaney**, self-effacing little **Edgar Slaney** (I can see him now, quietly sitting in the snug at The George, smoking his slim pipe, content with his thoughts until spoken to). What did these disparate characters have in common, either inherent or conditioned, that inspired them to unsurpassed heroism?

I believe there is no single answer. Each was responding to something within himself. For some, it may have been a centuries-old mining ethos, but not all the rescuers were traditional miners. Jobs were scarce at that time and employment opportunities were snatched, regardless of previous experience. But even those who had neither personal nor family mining background were still part of a community shaped and conditioned by centuries of lead mining. It is hard for those who were not born here to feel part of an essentially mining village, yet that is what it was barely 50 years ago. Spar was still being mined at Long Rake and Middleton Mine, a reopened Magpie Mine briefly offered lead

Week ending 18th. May 1932.					Employers. Insurance.
Name.	No. of Hrs.	Rate.	Total.		
Porter P.			4. 10. 0.		1/7.
Porter J.			2. 2. 6.		1/7.
Wright H.			3. 2. 6.		1/7.
Goldstraw J.	40	1/2	2. 6. 8.		1/7.
Redfern V.	35	1/2	2. 0. 10.		1/6.
Crowther W.	32	1/2.	1. 17. 4.		1/7.
Whiteman J.	24	1/2.	1. 8. 0.		1/7.
Humphreys D.	32	1/1.	1. 14. 8.		1/7.
Birds J.	32	11d.	1. 9. 4.		1/7.
Birds G.	25½	9d.	19. 1.		1/6.
Moore T.	25½	11d.	1. 3. 4.		1/7.
Boam G.	24	9d.	18. 0.		1/6.
Wright E.	25½	11d.	1. 3. 4.		1/7.
Slaney E.	24	1/-	1. 4. 0.		1/7.
Brindley W.	40	1/2.	2. 6. 8.		1/7.
Gallagher J.	40	1/1.	2. 3. 4.		1/7.
Oldfield P.	-	-	-		-
Gould G.	39	11d.	1. 15. 9.		1/7.
Frost J.	40	8d.	1. 6. 8.		1/2.
Frost G.	40	1/-	2. 0. 0.		1/7.
Stone L.	40	9d.	1. 10. 0.		1/6.
Smith L.	24	11d.	1. 2. 0.		1/7.
Webster C.	32	1/2.	1. 17. 4.		1/7.
Slaney H.	32	1/1.	1. 14. 8.		1/7.
Evans E.	32	1/-	1. 12. 0.		1/7.
Brassington A.	32	11d.	1. 9. 4.		1/7.
Slaney G.	32	10d.	1. 6. 8.		1/7.
Billinge J.	32	11d.	1. 9. 4.		1/7.
Barton O.	24	9d.	18. 0.		1/6.
Gregory P.	32	9d.	1. 4. 0.		1/6.
Slaney W.	27	11d.	1. 4. 9.		1/7.
E. Nowell.	-	-	17. 6.		1/2.
			52. 17. 7.		22. 7. 8.
			Insurance 2. 7. 3.		
			Total - 255. 5. 3.		

The wages sheet from Mawstone Mine for the week before the accident.



mining jobs and the fluorspar rejected by the old lead miners had become a profitable enterprise. The Barmote Courts, temples of the tradition, still had a practical function and the juries comprised working miners.

Some families knew little else. **Philip Oldfield**, one of the would-be rescuers in 1932, was typical: his father was a skilled miner who, despite his age, was on hand to offer his services at the mine. A brother worked with him at Shining Gutter and two others, one of whom was later killed in a rockfall at Long Rake, were spar miners. **Herbert** and **Ernest Wright** were miners by instinct as much as by choice. Herbert, with whom, years later, I occasionally passed the time of day, was steeped in mining lore. He took against a certain Cornishman who came to work at Long Rake and, since the latter was an amiable man, I was at a loss to understand why, until a possible explanation struck me. Around 200 years ago the Derbyshire lead miners 'had it in' for Cornishmen who had come with their pumps and know-how to rescue Derbyshire's industry from inundation. The sensible demand for financial guarantees by the Cornishmen (of whom my maternal forebears were part) was met by the owners at the expense of the local miners, who irrationally blamed the Cornishmen for their reduced livelihoods. They should have blamed the owners; instead, they took against the 'foreigners' who were actually saving their jobs. Could this resentment have entered Herbert's folk-memory? And if so, is not the obverse equally valid – an intense sense of loyalty to his own.

I was once taken down an underground quarry at Middleton-by-Wirksworth. It was more like a cathedral than a cavern. Vast pillars of rock supported the natural bed of the ceiling, between which the excavators had created quarry faces, one of which was pointed out to me. The face had exposed an old lead working and there it was in perfect section, like an apple sliced where a grub had tunneled. *T'owd man* had, grublike, followed the vein up and down in candlelit passages no bigger than his body could squeeze through, packing each spare cavity with waste rock to avoid taking it to the surface. And claustrophobia still grips me to think about it. Such bravery, such fortitude could only be inherent. Could a man daily descend to such a perilous livelihood without the certainty that, if need be, others would be impelled to his rescue?

Perhaps for others like **Eric** it was a challenge – life was for living, not to be wrested from his pals by wanton misfortune. **Jack** sought to save his best friend and **Kenneth Seville** must have been distraught with concern for his men. We shall never know what self-disregard drove them to their deaths.

Why did **George Frost**, already traumatised by his brush with death, choose to confront it again, well-knowing what awaited him down below? And his young son, **Jim**, standing by his father with courage beyond his years, barely managing to survive the encounter.

Whatever impelled the Mawstone rescuers, instinct or just plain comradeship, their own survival was a last resort. With no more protection from poisonous fumes than useless handkerchiefs (and in one case a cap) over their nose and mouths, fainting, disoriented, they staggered on in the baleful gloom through pools of water and debris to reach their stricken comrades, turning back only when they realized their mission was hopeless. For a gallant three the realisation came too late.

There were others whose bravery cannot be attributed to mining brotherhood. **Albert Harrison**, a farrier from Lincoln who came to Youlgrave as landlord of the Farmyard Inn after war service, descended the shaft and stood by to help the desperate survivors as they

staggered back from the gas. **Harry Ollerenshaw**, village blacksmith, arrived at the mine to find his close friend **Kenneth Seville** preparing to descend for the third and, as it proved, final time. He chose to go with him and almost paid for his devotion with his life. **Dr W.G. Harrison's** bravery is perhaps the easiest of all to define: doctors, by their calling, are relentless in saving life. Readers of A.J. Cronin's novels, himself a doctor, are familiar with the heroic part played by doctors in colliery disasters; it was a doctor whose constant endeavours to rescue the wounded in No Man's Land during the Great War earned him the rare distinction of a double Victoria Cross before they cost him his life. Duty called and was answered.

And that, after all, may be the simple explanation for this unsurpassed heroism. No need to peer into the whys and wherefores, no need to seek reason in personalities. It was the same for them all – duty called and duty was answered.

Afterwards the survivors carried on with their lives. They would talk to me about that day, if asked, but they went about their business without any fuss and we all moved on. They wore no badge, no ribbon to remind us that though the twenty third of May, nineteen hundred and thirty-two, may have been the saddest single day in our village history, we could count it as one of our proudest.

It was a day that saw this small, tightly-knit community instantly united in unalloyed grief and, for a while, there was comfort in mutual shock. But, human nature being what it is, when the shock subsides recrimination steps in. Before the hurting can stop a culprit must be found and the rumours that sought to mitigate the tragedy by finding a blameworthy explanation took root and persist even to this day. That the coroner saw fit to instruct his Inquest jury to ignore anything they may have heard is evidence that, within the space of a week, they had gained considerable currency. And so they remain – just rumours. The jury found no case to attach blame and so must we. Mystery, yes, and with hindsight we may see how the tragedy might have been avoided, but all that matters now are the memory of those who died and the courage of those who tried to save them.

How will we remember them? Will they be just names that have lost their meaning when there is no longer anyone to recall them? One day, perhaps, there will be a memorial to the Mawstone miners. There is still time, though barely, to ensure that, if and when that should come to be, they will be remembered by more than just names on a plaque. The facts of the tragedy are well-documented: the human story resides in the minds of a diminishing few. It is time to secure it for the generations yet to come.

## Part 2: People and personalities

### The Dead

**Kenneth Alfred Seville** (34), Managing Director

*“Be as quick as you can and do your best”*, were the parting words – perhaps the final words – of Kenneth Seville as he led his little band of would-be rescuers into the deathtrap that he now knew his mine to be. Were they the words of a man so desperate with anxiety as to imperil the lives of his men on a mission that cold logic should have told him was doomed? Or was it the instinct of leadership never to abandon a stricken comrade until all hope was gone that, as a commissioned officer on the Western Front, his experience in battle must have prepared him? Calm words of command they seem to be, yet having lost a lung through poison gas in the trenches and knowing from his two previous solitary attempts what awaited him down the drive, he must have uttered them with scant expectation of his own survival. As for his men, they had minds of their own. Would they have heeded him had he tried to turn them back? Certainly not Jack Birds for one,

implacably determined as he was to reach his best pal Geoff Gould. So, like almost all those endeavours above and beyond the call of duty that suppress the powerful human instinct for self-survival, the minds of Kenneth Seville and his party in that fateful moment of truth, must remain beyond our comprehension.

The course of events that led this ambitious young man to his fate at the bottom of an insignificant leadmine in Derbyshire is something of a mystery, too. He was a native of Leicester, born in 1898, who served in the Great War, after which he was employed in the Kent coalfield as a mining engineer. His first son, Peter, was born in 1920 in Chatham, his second, John, was born in Winster in 1922 and his two daughters, Betty and Jean were born in Youlgrave within the next few years. All this we know. What we don't know is where and how he acquired his professional qualifications (bearing in mind he was only 16 when the war in which he served broke out) and what drew him from the thriving coal industry in far-off Kent to the flagging orefield of Youlgrave. Did he, acting as a private entrepreneur, spot an opportunity and unhesitatingly seize it? We know he was resourceful in his activities and business acumen; that he recognised the potential of the last unexplored section of the Youlgrave orefield; that his adventurous exploration of old workings led him to the blockages in the sough system; that access to the coveted mineral would follow the clearance



*Kenneth Seville*

of the blockages and, finally, he had the confidence and resources to acquire the leases to all the mines and soughs in the area (including the once-powerful Alport Mining Company) which he then presented to the Mawstone Mining Company. Did he do all this as a director, already, of the newly-formed Bradford Vale Mining Company or did he present them with a package in exchange for a place on the Board? It's a mystery that would be tidy to solve, but it is of no great importance here. What matters is that we are left with a picture of a dynamic, resourceful and persuasive prospector who, far from being the servant of the Mawstone Mining Company as we might have supposed him to be, is the visionary, the driving force, behind a bold enterprise. While the circumstances that brought him to Youlgrave may be the subject of speculation, his influence once he got here is not. He was popular both in the village and in the mine. In a relatively short time he earned the respect and friendship usually accorded only to a lifelong acquaintance.

**THE HIGH PEAK NEWS, SATURDAY, MAY 28, 1932.**

## Victims of the Youlgrave Lead Mine Disaster.



Some of the victims of the Youlgrave lead mine disaster, reported on another page. From left to right the names are: Ernest Wright, badly gassed in rescue work; Geoffrey Gould, killed in the explosion; Herbert Wright, badly gassed in rescue work; John Gallagher, killed in the explosion; Eric Evans, killed in rescue work; Poultney Porter, killed in the explosion; Kenneth Alfred Neville, killed in rescue work; Jack Binks, killed in rescue work.

**BIRCHOVER.**  
**SUNDAY SCHOOL ANNIVERSARY.**  
The work of Miss Walton...  
The anniversary of the Sunday School was celebrated at the Birchover...  
The anniversary of the Sunday School was celebrated at the Birchover...  
The anniversary of the Sunday School was celebrated at the Birchover...

**BUXTON.**  
**HOUSING NEEDS.**  
**How Buxton is Fulfilling Them.**  
Alderman Goodwin's Address to Rotarians.

**HOSPITAL'S DEBT.**  
**Now Exceeds £2,400.**

*High Peak News, 28th May 1932*

### **Poultney Porter (57) and James Porter (27)**

Among the seven miners who died in the Mawstone Mine tragedy, there were two who came from outside Derbyshire and had no prior connections with Youlgrave.

Poultney Porter was an experienced miner who came from Cumberland (or Cumbria, as it is now.) He was born in 1874 at Threlkeld, near Keswick in the Lake District, and his unusual first name gave rise to many different spellings, most often 'Pultney'. By the age of 16 his occupation is recorded as 'lead miner', although when he married Maggie Tweddle in the Cumbria parish of Greystoke in 1898 it was given as 'driller'. Later he is referred to as a 'granite quarryman', but either way he moved his family to Braithwaite, near Keswick, where he became Mine Manager at nearby Force Crag Mine. Located at the head of the Coledale valley, Force Crag (now owned by the National Trust) was mined for lead and zinc, although baryte and cobalt were also present locally.

When Force Crag closed, Poultney sought his fortune abroad. He sailed to British Colombia in Canada and, if reports are true, spent some time gold mining in the Yukon. On

his return to Britain he moved his family to Derbyshire, settling in Darley Dale.

As Mine Captain, Poultney was one of the most experienced miners at Mawstone, working alongside his son. James was 27 at the time of the disaster, unmarried, and known to be technically-minded and an aspiring mining engineer. It's believed that the Porters lived in a building that once stood next to the Whitworth Hospital in Darley Dale.

### **John Gallagher (33)**

Widowhood came tragically twice to Mary Jane Gallagher (née Hawley). Her first husband, John Stevenson, had died on 16th August 1917 in the hell of Passchendael and, by a cruel irony, a letter from him saying all was well and not to worry arrived after the dreaded telegram. He has no known grave, just a name on the vast tablet of sorrow in Tyne Cot cemetery.

Jack Gallagher had been a wartime soldier, too, whom fate had allowed to return unscathed to his native Oldham. He and several other young men came to Youlgrave from various parts of the country to seek work during the late 1920s and early 1930s (the Depression years). Having found it in such pockets of employment as the Derbyshire Silica Firebrick Company at Friden, they married local girls and settled in the village. Perhaps Jack had previously worked in the exhausted Oldham coal mines or it may be he had, like many of his Mawstone workmates, just followed the money. Childless, Jack and Mary Jane lived with her parents in Church Street.

He was carried to his grave by eight representatives of the British Legion, of whom my father was one. His mother and brother came to the funeral from Oldham and, as they gazed on a landscape so very different from the one they had left, did she reflect on the twists of fate that had brought her son safely through the carnage of war only to die in this safe-seeming backwater of rural tranquillity?

### **William Geoffrey Gould (28)**

Geoff was not a born miner. His family farmed at Calling Low until his father fell victim to misfortune that ruined him and left him institutionalised. His mother, Nancy, and two sisters, Beryl and Leonie, left the farm and Geoff went to work on a farm in Lincolnshire. There he contracted bovine tuberculosis that necessitated surgery before, by now his health restored, he returned to Youlgrave. Meanwhile, his mother had gone to live as a housekeeper in a Derby vicarage, so Geoff was lodging at Coldwell End. In one of those strange little quirks of fate that later linked him with his best friend Jack Birds, Mrs Gould had previously been housekeeper to Dr Staley at Whytecotes before the family moved to Shaw. Geoff, the 28-year-old bachelor, footballer and popular man-about-village was about to settle into marriage when disaster struck.

### **William Brindley (22)**

"A good fast bowler, but a bit erratic," is how Bert Evans remembers Billy. I recall him as a boisterous assistant on Hollis & Gladwin's greengrocery cart, not knowing then that he was a bustling forward for Youlgrave football club and, as such, unable to resist kicking a ball



when he saw one. Had we known it, we children might have forgiven him when the bladder we were playing with was booted to destruction under the wheels of the greengrocery cart. We got over it – reluctantly.

Billy was a ‘topender’ and, but for his spell of hawking, not someone we ‘Bradfordites’ would have normally encountered. He lived at Coldwell End with his aunt, Mrs Thompson, and spent most of his leisure time commuting between the Reading Room and the Village Hall, regaling his chums with lurid tales of life in the mine where he was now more profitably employed. Perhaps there was a touch of bravado – what extrovert 22-year-old would be without it? – when he described how his workmates would put a match to the methane as it bubbled up through the pools. “One of these days,” he predicted, “we will all be blown to b\*\*\*\*\*y.”

He was buried alongside his fellow victims, but there is neither curb nor headstone to mark his grave – just a mound which, after all this time, I can no longer be sure is his.

### John William Birds (24)

Time back, some families seem to have been dogged by misfortune. Of Jack’s family of five sisters and four brothers, one sister had already died in tragic circumstances and his younger brother was to be killed in the war to follow. Lydia was in service at Whytecotes and, when the Staley family move to Shaw near Oldham, they took her with them. There she perished in a house fire.

Jack was a friend who passed by our cottage on his way to Shining Gutter and, sometimes, I would walk with him as far as the river. He – unusually for a grown-up – didn’t mind having an infant tagging along, provided he was in no hurry. A hurry he certainly was in when he was called to the rescue and that was the last I saw of him. Geoff Gould was his great friend and he died alongside him. Mr Birds followed later on his bicycle, arriving at the mine as his son’s body was carried out. Great though his sorrow must have been, it was said he gazed on his son with pride and murmured: “Well done, lad.”

**RESCUE BID  
IN MINE  
EXPLOSION**

K. Seville. E. Evans.

*Epic Stories of Workers' Heroism*

**GRIEF-STRICKEN VILLAGE TAKES  
HEART**

J. Porter. G. Gould. J. Gallagher. P. Porter.

*From Our Special Correspondent*

**E**PIC stories of the Youlgreave, Derbyshire, mine explosion were told yesterday when the grief-stricken village took heart. The explosion had left the air heavy with carbon monoxide. He said: "Mr. Seville was dying when the rescue party found him. He had penetrated into the workings half

*Daily Mail, 25th May 1932*

## **John Eric Evans (23)**

Everybody liked Eric and none more so than his erstwhile Bradford neighbours. He and his brother Cecil had lately moved to Meadow Cottage with their mother. Cecil was a talented artist who ran a spare-time painting club and, as the designer of the Barry's Croft well-dressing, coached a band of young future designers.

For Eric, the beauty of the countryside was enough; he had no desire to paint it. Strange, in a way, that someone whose great pleasure in life was to stroll the hills and dales with his little dog, Madge, should seek his livelihood where the sun never penetrated and where peace and tranquillity had no place. As he raced across the clapper bridge on his way to the stricken mine, perhaps he cast a hurried glance into his beloved dale, little knowing it would be his last. Happy-go-lucky Eric, so much to live for, so much to lose. His epitaph, tucked away in a quiet corner of the churchyard at All Saints, Youlgrave, speaks for them all: "Greater love hath no man than this, to lay down his life for his friends."

## **A time remembered – some personal accounts**

### ***Conversations remembered:***

***George Frost:*** *There was a tub filled with spoil from the work with the fan and while we were standing around Mr Porter said: "One of you take this up." Nobody else seemed to be making a move so I thought I might as well do it.*

***Herbert Wright:*** *We had to turn back. Eric was behind me and he said: "I'm done in, Herbert." I told him to get down and crawl. That's the last I remember*

### ***Seventy-five years on:***

***Joe Thornhill:*** *People were much more together in those days – more caring for each other. If I had to find a reason in one word it would be "poverty". We had very little, but what we had, we shared. Everybody helped each other and never expected anything in return. There were people we could look up to – men like Mr Greenshields and Mr Leach - and Miss Greenshields - who did so much good and set an example to us all.*

*We lived in the house below the Village Hall, my mother and father Joe, brother George and sisters Maud and Mary and we all attended the Wesleyan Reform Chapel – Sunday School twice and two services every Sunday.*

*During the week, Mr Porter and his son would come up from Darley Dale on Woolliscroft's bus, get off at the Old Hall and walk down Holywell Lane (which everybody called Oliver Lane) and across the river on the clapperbridge before they climbed the Old Mouth to The Furlong on their way to the mine. They could have got off at Church Corner and walked down Bradford to Mawstone Lane, but for some reason they always came past our gate with their haversacks on their shoulders. They were nice, friendly men and if they weren't in a hurry they would stop and have a word with me.*

*The Seville family lived just below and we children played together. I went to school*

with Peter before he began at Stancliffe as there was only a year or two between us. Mr Seville had a cricket pitch made for us in the croft and we spent a lot of time there alongside Meadow Cottage where Mrs Evans, Cecil and Eric had lately come to live. Cecil was a traveller for Johnsons flourmill.

Being right next door to the Village Hall club room, we saw quite a lot of the members, many of whom worked at the mine. My grandfather lived down Bradford so we knew most people there. Mother used to send me to Jack Birds on Stoneyside to get my hair cut. All you needed to become a part-time barber was a pair of scissors, a comb and some clippers and quite a few chaps supplemented their income this way. Weather permitting, everybody would sit out of doors and socialise. Jack would carry a stool out, perch me on it and proceed to give me a trim while his brothers sat on the wall and watched.

I used to watch Geoff Gould and Billy Brindley playing football for Youlgrave. They used a leather caseball in those days... it must have been like heading a cannonball when it got wet. Geoff was fearless – he laid himself out more than once. I thought I would like to be like him when I got older.

I was with Peter Seville that evening after the explosion. He came back from the mine and said his father had been gassed, but he was alright and had gone down again.

I heard the funeral procession go by later that week, but I didn't see it. My mother kept me indoors out of respect.

**Ernest Oldfield:** I was eight. I ran across to my grannie's at the top of Braemar Lane and my uncle Phillip was dashing out putting his coat on as he went. I asked my granny what had happened and she said: "The mine's blown up". I had this picture in my mind of the whole lot going up in the air. Phillip got an award for bravery but he never spoke about what happened.

**Joan Rowland (née Marshall):** Eric was a lovely lad. I adored him. He and his brother Cecil lived at the bottom of Bradford with their mother. I used to run errands for Mrs Evans when I came home from school. We lived nearby on Stoneyside and my mother was her friend. Eric was full of fun. He used to tease us children with tricks, like wrapping a penny in silver paper and pretending it was half a crown. I don't think he had any special friends – his little dog Madge was his best friend, they roamed everywhere together, especially the dale, which he loved.

His mother had come from Baslow and his sister Emily was brought up there with her grandparents. Mr Evans had left home after the



Eric Evans, 23 at the time of the Disaster  
(photo courtesy of Jean Rowland).

*Great War and gone to live in the Manchester area and that might have been the reason why Emily was separated. It often happened in those days. Relatives looked after each other and were much closer, and nobody thought anything of it when children were “shared”.*

*Mrs Evans was heartbroken when Eric died. She went back to live in Baslow but it was her wish to be brought back to Youlgrave and buried with Eric when she died. She is with him now. I was heartbroken, too. I was only ten but I thought the world of him. Even at that age I thought that if I ever had a son of my own I would call him Eric. When I grew up and married Ernest we had a son. We called him Eric.*

**Bernard Oldfield:** *We lived in Knocking Alley. Geoff Gould was lodging with Mrs Thompson on nearby King Street and he came to our house with Jack Bacon. It was Welldressing – or it might have been the Carnival. Gladys Dawson and Nellie Salt had come down from Friden and were in our house with a friend of my mother’s. Geoff and Jack walked Gladys and Nellie back to Friden (pushing their bikes) and Geoff and Gladys must have hit it off because they were engaged when he was killed.*

*I didn’t go to the mine that night, but I heard them talking in the house and, being curious as eight-year old lads are, I went down the yard and climbed the wall where I could see right across the valley to where the mine was lit up. The clanking of the cage rising and falling and the rattle of chains went on till after bed time and that is what has stayed in my mind.*

**Martha Prime (née Birds):** *I was a 12-year-old when my brother Jack was killed. I had another brother, George, who also worked at the mine and would have gone with Jack if he hadn’t been helping out on Greenfields Farm and, thankfully, knew nothing about the accident.*

*Jack had been to Bakewell market and was resting on the sofa around six-o’clock when a knock came at the door and Neilly Roper told him he was wanted urgently at the mine where there was trouble. He ran off straightaway and that’s the last time we saw him alive. My father rode his bike over to see if there was anything he could do to help and was just going down when they brought Jack’s body up.*

*He was a quiet lad. He had worked at the mine for some time and always came home looking neat and tidy – never complained about work and got on with the job, but we knew that things had been going wrong for some time. Lots of the lads had gone to the market that day and they all came back in a hurry.*

*Jack was very musical. It was his life and I never knew him to bother much with girls. He was in the band and sometimes he played his cornet at the Bulls Head. He and three others formed a dance band called Knoxall: Fred Billinge, Fred (Scotty) Shimwell and - I think - Geoff Gould were the others. Geoff Gould was his best pal.*

*My brother was buried in the family plot a day before the others, but I don’t know why.*

**Angela McNevin (née Campbell):** *Uncle Herbert went back to work in the spar mine at Long Rake and didn’t seem affected by his experience, but Uncle Ernest never went underground again. He couldn’t bring himself to do it.*

## Part 3: Monday 23rd May 1932

Mawstone Mine had been idle over the weekend of 21st-22nd May. The ventilation fan appears to have been turned off prior to maintenance work, as measures were evidently being taken to address the Inspector's concerns in his letter of the previous week. Smoking had been banned underground and miners had to wear electric safety lamps instead of using naked flame lamps.

The men were working on the electric blower fan that brought air into the mine via a 12 inch diameter canvas pipe. The fan, which was originally 90ft from the shaft bottom, was moved further away in an effort to improve ventilation. When work on the fan resumed on Monday 23rd May, a test for firedamp found that ventilation was still "only fair", and work continued to improve the ventilation.

A decision was made to alter the method of ventilation. Until now the mechanical fan had delivered clean air *into* the driveway of the level, but for some reason it was decided to reverse this procedure, so that the fan would in effect draw *out* the bad air. However, this would mean that the canvas pipes would collapse under a negative pressure, so they needed to be replaced with metal ones – which is what the men were engaged in doing that Monday afternoon.

Six men were down Mawstone Mine that day, working on the ventilation fan: Poultney Porter, James Porter, William Brindley, Geoffrey Gould, John Gallagher and George Frost. They descended about 3.30pm, and then at about 5.20pm James Porter came back up the surface to go to the Mine office. He assured Joseph Goldstraw, the engineman from Biggin Moor, that all was well below. Porter then went back down.

It was about 5.30pm in the afternoon and the six men were about 200 yards from the mine shaft. George Frost, the only survivor from the six, was able to give an account of what happened. He remembers holding a light aloft to allow James Porter to fix some wires and fuses in the switch box for the fan, but that the fan wouldn't restart. Frost then left the others to take a tub to the shaft bottom, and it was as he was returning that he was suddenly thrown to the ground by an almighty explosion. He struggled back to the shaft bottom, falling down several more times, and reaching the cage he sounded the signal to go up.

On the surface, Goldstraw likened the explosion to "a very big gush of wind and then a rumble like thunder." The force of the blast lifted some timber planks around the shaft entrance.

### The rescue attempts

When George Frost was brought to the top, deeply shaken and his clothes reportedly ripped, he told the others what had happened. Kenneth Seville, the Mine Manager, acted instantly. According to Goldstraw, he went down the mine alone and was underground for about 15 minutes. When Seville returned he was in an exhausted condition, but he told onlookers that he had located the men. According to Goldstraw, Seville said: "Thank God they are alive", but despite trying he had been unable to pull anyone out.



As other miners and villagers arrived on the scene, rescue parties formed and began to descend the mine. Jim Frost and brothers Ernest and Herbert Wright were the among the first to go down, followed by Philip Oldfield and Dr W. G. Harrison – the first time he had ever gone underground. Kenneth Seville himself headed one group, together with Eric Evans and Jack Birds, two of the youngest workers at the mine and who, on hearing the news of the disaster, had run all the way over from Youlgrave to help. By the end of the evening all three would be brought out dead.

Joseph Goldstraw later confirmed that there was absolutely no question of any man being ordered to go down the mine to help with the rescue – from miner to pub landlord, doctor to blacksmith, they acted without hesitation and without any regard for themselves.

An appeal for help was sent to the North Midlands Coal Owners' Rescue Stations at Mansfield and Chesterfield, but there was no time to wait.

Harry Ollerenshaw, Youlgrave's blacksmith, who was a member of one of the first rescue parties, told a reporter from the *Derbyshire Times* about the early rescue efforts:

*"Mr Harrison, of the Farmyard Inn came and told me that Mr Seville had rung him up and asked him to bring help to the mine. When I arrived there I found Mr Seville near to collapse. He said he had been down, and had just returned from the drive where the explosion had occurred.*

*While he was there he had found one of the men, whom he believed was Porter, the underground manager. Mr Seville told me he attempted to get Porter out but had to give up as he was done up.*

*Mr Seville said he was going down again, and I said if he were I would go with him. About six of us went down in the party, and we visited the drive, with Mr Seville in the lead. He was followed, I believe, by one of the Wrights – Herbert, I think. I was third, and Mr Harrison was also in the party.*

*We had gone about 100 yards from the shaft when I had to turn back. I felt that if I went any further I should be overcome and others would have to drag me out. The others went forwards, and a little later I heard a groan from down the drive.*

*Some of the others brought the man back down the drive. I helped to get him to the cage, though I was somewhat crooked. Soon afterwards we heard another groan and two of us went down the drive and found a man. Who he was I cannot tell you.*

*About 10 minutes later there was another groaning noise. I went up the drive again and found one of the Wrights and helped him to the cage. Dr Harrison was down the mine for quite a while, doing what he could.*

*The men from the rescue stations arrived a little later, and they were properly equipped with masks. We had no protection beyond handkerchiefs, which we had tied round our faces.*

*It was bad in the drive when you got any distance in and an oil safety lamp would not stop in when you went any distance up the drive.*

*Mr Seville, when he went up the drive, had an electric lamp fastened to his head, and the light was still burning when the men from the rescue stations brought him out.*

*Mr Seville's death is a great blow to me, for he was like a brother to me."*

Derbyshire Times, 28th May 1932

Other rescuers told similar stories. With no specialist apparatus, they breathed through handkerchiefs – or, in the case of Philip Oldfield, just held a cap in front of his nose and mouth! Ernest Wright said that the fumes were terrible and that it was almost impossible to see. Along with other members of the rescue party, he came across the bodies of three of the men. Two were lying together, and a third, whom he believed was Eric Evans, was in a pool of water. By then he was feeling the effects of the gas, and after trying in vain to get Evans out they had to make their way back to the shaft. Wright remembers hearing others coming towards them – but then he lost consciousness.

It's said that Jack Birds lost his life in an unsuccessful attempt to save his friend and fellow miner Geoffrey Gould. Even though Birds was feeling the ill effects of the fumes and was told to go back, he carried on in a desperate effort to rescue his friend.

Herbert Slaney of Bank Top, Youlgrave, gave his version of events to a reporter from the *Daily Mail*:

*“There were acrid fumes like thick fog, making useless our electric lamps; the heat was unbearable and the poisoned atmosphere was death itself. I crawled for nearly 20 yards before realising the hopelessness of it all, and I got back just in time.*

*Dr W. C. Harrison, who lives in the village, quickly joined us at the foot of the shaft, and although it was his first experience down a mine he stuck it until the last man had been brought to the top. He worked magnificently.”*

*Dr Harrison, dismissing the idea of his personal bravery with a brief reference to “about half an hour down the pit”, told me of his belief that the explosion had left the air heavy with carbon monoxide.*

*He said: “Mr Seville was dying when the rescue party found him. He had penetrated into the workings half-way to the scene of the explosion, without a gas mask or any sort of protection from what he must have known was a certain death. His courage can only be described as magnificent.”*

Daily Mail, 25th May 1932

## **Casualties brought to the surface**

The first body brought up was that of Eric Evans, followed by the Mine Manager himself. The casualties were taken to the Mine office, just across from the shaft head, which was rapidly transformed into a temporary first aid station. Here Dr Harrison and Nurse Stevenson, the temporary district nurse, attempted to resuscitate the unconscious men. It's said that some of the men, including Kenneth Seville, showed “faint signs of life” when brought to the surface, but after nearly two exhausting hours of artificial respiration it was decided to give up. It was conjectured that Seville's chances of survival, in particular, were probably diminished because he had been gassed during the Great War.

In addition to the eight fatalities, a number of other miners suffered from the effects of gas. Four of the volunteer rescue parties – Ernest and Herbert Wright (brothers), Philip Oldfield and George Frost – were either in the mine at the time of the explosion or went down to try and rescue their comrades, and all suffered from the effects of the harmful fumes.

The rescue party from Chesterfield and Clay Cross arrived around 7pm, complete with breathing apparatus, but it was already too late. That night, the engine-room of the mine was converted into a temporary mortuary and the eight bodies lay there until the inquest on Tuesday.

THE DERBYSHIRE TIMES, SATURDAY, MAY 28, 1932.

# LEAD MINE DISASTER.

## Eight Men Killed by Explosion at Youlgreave.

### MANAGER'S SELF-SACRIFICE.

### Rescue Workers' Heroism in Deadly Fumes.

**H**EROISM unsurpassed in the history of mining was displayed by rescue workers at the Mawstone Lead Mine, Youlgreave, on Monday, when, as the result of an explosion, eight men lost their lives.

Five men in the workings were immediately overcome by fumes, and of the rescue workers, who battled bravely against the terrible conditions with only handkerchiefs tied over their faces to protect them from the poisonous atmosphere, three gave their lives.

Mr. K. A. Seville, the manager, sacrificed his life in his heroism and devotion to duty. At the first warning of the disaster he descended the workings and attempted to help those who were lying helpless, until he himself was almost on the verge of collapse. After a brief respite on the top he went down a second time, and then a third, from which he failed to return until he was found dead, lying across the bodies of two of the workmen.

While the hitherto peaceful village has been plunged into grief, the residents are proud of the men who went down the mine—and there was no lack of volunteers—in gallant attempts to rescue their fellow-men.

An inquest was opened on Tuesday by the High Peak Coroner (Mr. S. Taylor), and adjourned until next Tuesday.

*One by one the bodies of the men were recovered, but it was not until long after dusk that the last one was brought up.*

*The scene at the mine head as darkness descended was reminiscent of those too familiar in the coal mining centres. There was a terrible strangeness and tension about the atmosphere, and the groups of watchers, their faces lit by lights at the mine head and from the windows of the offices, discussed the tragedy in quiet tones.*

*The drone of the engine and the occasional clanging of the bell to indicate that the cage was about to come up were almost the only sounds which broke the stillness of the night. No one could have stood in that crowd without feeling strangely moved.*

*When the cage came up carrying, sometimes, a still figure on a stretcher, the crowd stood in reverent silence, heads bared, paying their tribute to some one whom they probably knew.*

*It was not until the last body had been brought to the surface that the crowd began to return to their homes.*

Derbyshire Times, 28th May 1932

## Part 4: The aftermath

### The Inquest: What happened and why?

The Inquest into the events of Monday was opened at the Mine Manager's office the day after, in order for relatives of the deceased to formally identify the bodies. It was then adjourned and reopened a week later at Youlgrave Village Hall.

The Inquest was conducted by Mr S. Taylor, the District Coroner, together with Mr J. R. Felton (Divisional Inspector of Mines) and a jury with Mr A. Marsden as foreman. Others present were Mr A. L. Flint (Inspector of Mines), Dr Fisher (Medical Inspector of Mines), Mr F. W. Scolah (for the Mawstone Mine Company), Major H. C. Brooke Taylor (representing Mrs Seville), Mr J. S. Potter (for Eric Evans' relatives) and Mr Cockerton (for Jack Birds' relatives). Also attending were other directors of the mining company, plus relatives and friends of the victims.

The Coroner told the jury to disregard everything that they had heard the past few days and return a verdict based solely on the available evidence.

### Eyewitness accounts

The first witness called was George Frost of Bank Top, Youlgrave. He said that, along with the five other men, he was working in the mine on Monday afternoon fixing an electric fan in the drive, about 200 yards from the bottom of the shaft. It was about 5.30pm and he left the men to take a wagon to the bottom of the shaft. After sending up the wagon he started to go back up the drive.

*"I had gone up the drive about 10 to 15 yards," he added, "when there was something like a strong gust of wind and something knocked me down. I was knocked down two or three times and I managed somehow to reach the cage at the bottom of the shaft and get to the top. I believe it went up once before I could get in."*

Frost told the Inquest that he saw or felt just the wind – no heat, flame or light. He said there was a smell of gas when he went down the mine with the others earlier in the afternoon and although nothing was said about it at the time, Poultny Porter tested for gas and said that he thought they would be all right if they went up the drive and finished the work they had to do. George Frost said that they all relied on Mr Porter. He said that when the six of them originally went down the mine at 3pm they had oil safety lamps and electric lamps. There was no fixed electric lamp lit where the fan was fixed, so far as he knew, on the Monday. A compressed air jet was blowing during the time they were working in the drive, fixed within a few yards of the fan. Frost confirmed that James Porter made two attempts to start the fan.

*"When he first tried I thought it gave a turn or two, but he said he would have to go to the top. He went up and came down, looked at the fuses, put them back again and tried to start the fan. The fan did not start and James Porter went away again. He returned and tried to get the fan going, but it was not running when I left for the shaft with the tub. I was on my way back from the shaft when I think I heard the rumble of the fan running."*



*Evening Chronicle, 24th May 1932*

Replying to further questions, Frost said the fan had previously been running nearer the shaft. It was moved up to its new position on the Thursday or Friday before the explosion. He saw the fan running in its new position for a short time on one of the days and understood that when it was moved to its new position it was to suck "bad air" out and not blow.

Frost also confirmed that smoking was not allowed down the mine. Matches were found on the bodies of some of the dead miners, but he said that the men sometimes took matches with them for firing shots in the mine. PC Burnett later told the Coroner that both matches and cigarettes had been found in some of the pockets of the clothing belonging to the dead miners.

Philip Oldfield of Bradford, Yowlgrave, went down the mine with the Wrights and James Frost to rescue his friends and comrades. In the drive, deep below, he saw the two Wright brothers trying to pull a man from out of the water (it was up to his waist at one point). He helped drag him for four or five yards when he had to give up as he felt his strength going. Oldfield said his head was aching and he had no control over himself. He felt his legs going and he fell two or three times, but managed to get up. He shouted and someone came towards him – and fortunately he managed to get out.

Mr G. Harry Ollerenshaw of Church Street, Yowlgrave, told the Inquest that when he reached the mine, Seville asked him to ring the doctor and find the telephone numbers of the Inspector of Mines and the rescue workers at Chesterfield. Ollerenshaw went down with a rescue party and managed to get about 100 yards up the drive before he began to feel the effects of the gas and had to turn back. He said when Seville and he went down the mine



they knew the rescue team was on its way from Chesterfield.

Herbert Wright was too ill to attend the Inquest, but his brother, Ernest, of Coldwell End, Youlgrave, gave evidence. He had worked at the mine about six months, and was down the mine from 12 midnight until 8am on the Thursday before the explosion. They were told by Seville to use safety lamps and not acetylene lamps, and while he agreed that there probably was gas in the mine he felt it wasn't enough to affect their work or stop them working.

## Expert submissions

Dr W. Harrison told the Inquest that he examined all the bodies as they were recovered and in two cases – Poultney Porter and Eric Evans – conducted post mortems. On Porter he found extensive burns on the face, arms and forearms, and there were three scalp wounds. The burns were purely superficial and not deep. Porter's skull was not fractured, and in his opinion death in this case was due to "carbon monoxide poisoning accelerated by shock and burns". On examining Evans, he found abrasions on the chest, legs and elbows. Death in this case, he said, was due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

### ***Sympathy and condolences: Duke of Devonshire's message***

*The outside world showed its sympathy for Youlgrave yesterday, and one of the first messages came from the Lord Lieutenant of the County, the Duke of Devonshire, who sent the following telegram to the Vicar of Youlgrave (the Rev L. W. Greenshields):*

*"The Duchess and I are shocked and distressed to hear of the terrible disaster in the Mawstone Mine. Please convey our heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved families in the tragic loss which they have sustained. No words can express our admiration for those gallant men who gave their lives in an effort to rescue the victims of the explosion." At present the cause of the explosion is a mystery. Experts are puzzled to understand how it could have occurred in a lead mine.*

*It is understood that Lord Hartington, M. P. for West Derbyshire, may ask a question in the House this week to secure some further information from Mr Isaac Foot, the Secretary for Mines.*

Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 25th May 1932

He confirmed that, for all the eight victims, death was due to carbon monoxide poisoning exacerbated by burns and shock, but that the burns in themselves were not sufficient to cause death. Three of the men, in particular, showed pronounced effects of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Giving evidence, the Deputy Inspector of Mines, Mr G. M. Harvey, said that the fan motor was in good condition and certainly flameproof, and he hadn't found any of the fuses burnt. The switch was housed in a cast iron box, but he noted that this had been drilled for cables to enter which – because the cables didn't completely fill up the holes – allowed air (and therefore gas) to enter. The box itself was not flame-proof and on testing the switch he discovered that it 'arced' when switched on – and, more especially, when it switched off.

Mr Harvey suggested that the men probably succeeded in getting the fan running and, satisfied that it was working properly, stopped it once more in order to join up the canvas tubing to the fan. However, in switching it off, the deadly result was a spark – small in itself, but with catastrophic consequences.

### ***Tribute to Men's Bravery***

*In his summing up, the Coroner said the one bright feature in the inquiry had been the tremendous bravery and willingness to do everything possible shown by those who went into the mine to try to save the five men.*

*He asked the jury to give him the best verdict possible. So far as the medical part of the verdict was concerned, it was quite clear as to the cause of death. The second portion of the verdict would not be so easy, though he thought it would fall into the category of an accident. Even an accident could have various degrees of negligence, and the important point was whether they could put their finger on anything pointing to negligence on anybody's part. It was just possible that, owing to the holes in the side of the switchbox not being completely filled, a mixture of gas and it got into the box and a spark caused the explosion. All the men knew there was a certain amount of gas about, and the mine captain, who was an experienced man, made tests and came to the conclusion that it was safe for them to go on working.*

*Having regard to the fact that the tests were made by an experienced man, who passed it as fit to work, and who himself was a member of the working party, he did not think there was any blame there.*

*The jury, after retiring, returned a verdict that death in case of the five who were working in the mine was due to carbon monoxide poisoning accelerated by burns and shock following an explosion the cause of which the evidence was not clear enough for the jury to say. In the case of the three others, the verdict was that the men died from carbon monoxide poisoning following an explosion, the cause of which the evidence was not clear enough for the jury to say.*

Derbyshire Times, 4th June 1932

### ***Burial of five mine victims***

*Youlgreave mourned her lost sons yesterday. Five of the victims of the lead mine disaster were buried in the graveyard in the shadow of the ancient grey stone church upon the hill, within sight of the mine in which they lost their lives.*

*And Youlgreave mourned with them with the natural simplicity and sincerity which become the hardy folk of a Derbyshire village. There was no display and no excess of emotion, but there was scarcely an inhabitant of Youlgreave who did not brave the pouring rain to pay a last tribute to the dead.*

*The five who were buried were Kenneth Alfred Seville (manager of the mine), William Brindley, John Gallagher, Geoffrey Gould and Eric Evans.*

*The service, in which several dominations united, was held in the Parish Church and was conducted by the Rev L. W. Greenshields (Vicar of Youlgreave), assisted by three Nonconformist ministers from Bakewell – the Rev D. Parton (Primitive Methodist), the Rev J. C. Atkinson (Wesleyan), and Rev F. W. Nutall (Wesleyan Reform)*

### ***Weeping Skies***

*It was not until yesterday that the visitor could assess the severity of the blow the disaster has dealt to the little community at Youlgreave, for Derbyshire people have a sturdy philosophy which prevented any outburst of grief on the day of the tragedy.*

*But yesterday the whole village went into mourning, and the skies, so it seemed, wept in sympathy.*

*The normal life of the village ceased. All the shops were shut, the mines and quarries in the immediate neighbourhood closed down, while in the village window blinds and curtains were drawn. Hundreds joined in the funeral procession, which must have been quite half a mile in length, stretching nearly the whole length of the village street, and the majority of the mourners were of course, relatives of the men.*

*Almost everybody in the village felt a personal grief, for not only were the victims known to all, but the majority of the inhabitants of Youlgreave were related to one or other of them.*

### ***Legion Parade***

*There were representatives, too, from other parts of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The local branch of the British Legion paraded in full strength, for Mr Seville was the chairman of it and there were officers of the Legions from Derby and Nottingham. The Youlgreave troop of Boy Scouts paid their tribute, and many were the mourners from neighbouring villages. Hundreds of wreaths were sent – from the Mawstone Mining Company and other mining companies, from individuals, and from the little Derbyshire villages around.*

*To the mournful sound of the muffled bells the long procession passed slowly along the village street. The coffins were borne by comrades of the dead; men who worked with them in the mine and assisted in the rescue work. Behind each coffin followed the family mourners, then the Scouts, the British Legion, and the village people.*

Sheffield Independent, 28th May 1932



*Sheffield Independent, 28th May 1932*

### **The funeral: Youlgrave mourns her dead**

For the Porter family it was, of course, a shattering blow to lose both father and son. Left behind were wife and mother Maggie and four remaining, grown-up children – two sons and two daughters. (One of the sons was employed as a mining engineer at nearby Mill Close mine.) The bodies of Poultney and James were taken back to Cumberland for burial in the family plot at St Andrew's Church, Greystoke, near Penrith.

Of the remaining six victims, Jack Birds was laid to rest in Youlgrave on Thursday 26th May, while the funeral for the remaining five miners took place in Youlgrave the day after. It was a wet, mournful and desperately sad day for the whole community.

Members of the local branch of the British Legion, together with visiting members, assembled at the Bull's Head Hotel, and then proceeded to The Crimbles – Kenneth Seville's home – and walked before the coffin from the house to the church. The branch's new standard, draped with a box of black, was carried aloft, and as the procession reached the church it was joined by the other three corteges. (Geoffrey Gould's body had lain in the church overnight.)

The service in the church was brief and simple. The hymns chosen were 'Jesu, Lover of My Soul' and 'Nearer My God To Thee', accompanied by organist Edwin Shimwell. Prior to the arrival of the corteges, selections from the works of Liddle, Suter, Mendelssohn and Sutton were played on the organ by Mr E Throp, who also played the 'Dead March' (Saul) as the mourners left the church.

In addition to family mourners and members of Youlgrave British Legion and Boy Scouts, there were members of the village cricket club and two buglers from the 6th Battalion Sherwood Forester.

After the committal prayers had been read, the buglers sounded 'The Last Post' and then the 'Reveille'. The procession was marshalled by Mr G. Harry Ollerenshaw. Flowers were heaped on the graves of the five men, but the heavy rain made some of the cards and dedications indecipherable.

Lord and Lady Hartington sent the following telegram:

*"Horried to hear the news of the terrible disaster. Please convey our sympathy to the relatives of the miners who have been killed and those who gave their lives in the heroic attempt to save others."*

Another telegram was received from the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy:

*"The Council of the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy offer their heartfelt sympathy with the bereaved families in the great loss sustained through the disaster at your mine" – Sydney Smith (president) and Charles McDermid (secretary).*

As a mark of sympathy for the bereaved families, Youlgrave Cricket Club cancelled the match they had arranged with Rowsley on Thursday. The Primitive Methodist rally, which was to have been held in Youlgrave on the Saturday (the day after the funeral) was also postponed to a later date.

## YOULGREAVE MOURNS HER DEAD.

### BURIAL OF FIVE MINE VICTIMS.

#### SCENES AT HILLTOP CHURCHYARD.

#### MUFFLED BELLS.

Youlgrave mourned her lost sons yesterday. Five of the victims of the lead mine disaster were buried in the graveyard in the shadow of the ancient grey stone church upon the hill, within sight of the mine in which they lost their lives.

And Youlgrave mourned them with the natural simplicity and sincerity which become the hardy folk of a Derbyshire village. There was no display and no excess of emotion, but there was scarcely an inhabitant of Youlgrave who did not brave the pouring rain to pay a last tribute to the dead.

The five who were buried were Kenneth Alfred Seville (manager of the mine), William Brindley, John Gallacher, Geoffrey Gould, and Eric Evans.

The service, in which several denominations united, was held in the Parish Church and was conducted by the Rev. L. W. Greenshields (Vicar of Youlgrave), assisted by three Nonconformist ministers from Bakewell—the Rev. D. Parton (Primitive Methodist), the Rev. J. C. Atkinson (Wesleyan), and Rev. F. W. Nuttall (Wesleyan Reform).

them in the mine and assisted in the rescue work. Behind each coffin followed the family mourners, then the Scouts, the British Legion, and the village people.

#### FORESTERS' SERVICE.

There was a simple service in the church, during which the Foresters' Funeral service was read by County Councillor A. Marsden, a former High Chief Ranger of the Ancient Order of Foresters, who lives in Youlgrave.

Finally there was the Last Post, sounded by Drum-Major Hopkinson and Drummer Hammond, of the 6th Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. Among those present were Mr. W. W. Wood, junr. (director), Mr. H. Bramall (secretary), and Mr. G. L. Grace, representing the Mawstone Mines, Ltd.; Capt. Cavendish, adjutant of the 6th Battalion Sherwood Foresters; Dr. Harrison, of Youlgrave, and Nurse Stephenson, of Bakewell, who played such a heroic part on the night of the disaster.

The British Legion was represented by



"SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT" PHOTOGRAPH.

Members of the British Legion at the funeral, yesterday, of Youlgrave mine disaster victims.

### MAKING TEACUPS.

#### DEMONSTRATION AT A SHEFFIELD STORE.

How many people know that an ordinary teacup passes through 120 hands before it is sold over the counter—possibly for two pence?

This was one of the interesting facts made known to the large audiences which attended the practical displays of pottery in the making at Messrs. J. F. Darley and Son's showrooms, The Moor, Sheffield yesterday. Alderman Harold Jackson, the Deputy Lord Mayor, is to open the demonstration to-day, and a special invitation is extended to children.

A realistic oven has been fitted up to show methods of baking, and a potter worker lectures as he works, moulding teacups, plates, classical statuettes and a

Sheffield Independent, 28th May 1932

### ***Father and Son buried side by side in Cumberland Village***

*Two of the victims of the Yowlgreave disaster, Poultny Porter (57) and his son, James (27) were buried side by side yesterday in the parish churchyard at Greystoke, near Penrith, in the presence of a large gathering of villagers and people from the surrounding district. The Vicar, the Rev R. F. Smyth, officiated. Many beautiful floral tributes including one from the mining company were laid on the grave.*

*The Porters formerly working in mines at Thornthwaite, near Keswick, and the wife of Mr Porter sen. was formerly a Miss Tweddle of a family well-known in the Threlkeld and Greystoke district of Cumberland.*

Sheffield Independent, 28th May 1932



*The bodies of Mine Captain Poultny Porter and his son, James, were taken north to be buried in the family grave at Greystoke, near Penrith (photo courtesy of Debbie Porter).*





*Five of the victims of the Mawstone Mine Disaster were buried in the graveyard of All Saints Parish Church, Youlgrave. Above: Eric Evans and Geoffrey Gould lie side by side. Below: Kenneth Seville. Nearby are the graves of Jack Gallagher and William Brindley.*







*The small group of men in the centre of the photo are pictured meeting the Prince of Wales at Ashford. Left to right: Herbert Slaney, Edgar Slaney, Ernest Wright and Herbert Wright (photo courtesy of Ashford War Memorial Institute).*

## **Rescuers honoured**

On 2nd June 1932, several of the rescuers from the Mawstone Mine disaster were presented to the Prince of Wales, during his visit to the War Memorial Institute at Ashford-in-the-Water. The Prince (later King George VI) met Herbert Slaney, Edgar Slaney, Ernest Wright and Herbert Wright, together with Mr W. Wood, Chairman of the Directors of the Mawstone Mine Company. A newspaper article reported the encounter:

*“The Prince was deeply concerned regarding the explosion and questioned the men closely as to how it occurred. He asked how many men there were in the mine and how many were killed, and on being informed of the facts he remarked sadly “Very bad luck.” Messrs G. Frost, J. Frost and P. Oldfield, who were among the rescuers, were unfortunately not well enough to attend.”*

### ***Council's Sorrow: Appreciation of Rescue Workers at Youlgreave***

*Before the opening of the ordinary business at Bakewell Rural Council, on Monday, Mr E. Walker (chairman) referred to the Youlgreave disaster, and said that for a country village the magnitude of it was very great. He suggested that they should extend their sympathy to the relatives of the men. They all, he said, admired those men who gave their lives in the attempt to save their comrades.*

*As indicative of their sympathy with the bereaved relatives, the members stood in silence for a few moments.*

*Mr A. Marsden said that as one of the representatives for the grief-stricken village, he could assure the members that their sympathy would be appreciated by not only the relatives and friends of the men who lost their lives in the disaster, but by the whole village. Youlgreave had never before in its history experienced such grief and sorrow. He thanked Mr Walker, the Duke of Devonshire, Father Firth, and others for the messages of sympathy they had sent.*

*He greatly appreciated the reference made by the Chairman to the heroism of the men who attempted to rescue the others. Had it not been for the action taken by the rescue workers, who came from away, it was possible that more might have lost their lives, for the whole of the young men of the village who assembled at the mine head would willingly have gone down the mine to try to save the men who were caught by the explosion.*

Derbyshire Times, 4th June 1932



**SURVIVORS OF THE DISASTER.**

Left to right: L. Stone, E. Slaney, D. Humphrey, A. Brassington, J. H. Slaney, J. Frost.

Derbyshire Times, 28th May 1932

## EMPLOYMENT DEBATE.

Old M.P.'s Speech in the House of Commons.

Y. in the first of the three party debate in the House of Commons on unemployment, Mr. R. J. E. P., M.P. for the Chesterfield district, stressed the value of tariff as a saving weapon, and stressed the value of the various economies until economy had been reduced to reduced taxes and reduced on industry. He maintained industry that required special aid that could not wait for of world trade, was the coal while agriculture was in some position.

A few points, Mr. Conant believed agreement among members supported the Government and supported one or other of the must be that a real cure for unemployment could only be effected by action, and that no action on the part of one nation or government would bring about

possible for any artificial prosperity to be created in one the exclusion of the rest of and so it was most essential, the steps which should be we should draw a clear distinction between those steps aimed at recovery of world trade and for the purpose of relief in sense—relief work, relieving maintaining the efficiency of workers, and so on. They were separate problems.

It seemed to have been considered to a consideration of what a far less important question of how the effects of unemployment could be mitigated and could be brought to the unemployed.

## EFFECT OF MACHINERY.

Members have referred to the effect upon employment and which mass production must the numbers employed. It is a fact that in a normal world, there were no trade barriers, over-speaking broadly, was an impossibility because the requirements of could never be satisfied mass production, leading to a reduction of the requirements of caused a dislocation of employment changing over from one trade

It could not have any persisting effect on the numbers. But, unfortunately, conditions world-to-day were not normal. A country had adopted various trade—tariffs, quotas, licences. So there was within the country a state akin to over-artificially created. Imports and exports were restricted, entirely the requirements of the country could not be satisfied. It was what was really over-created by artificial means. The moment in restoring world use the tremendous influence now had in the world, mainly efforts of the National Government induce other countries to barriers. Not only tariffs but debts, reparations and were all parts of the restriction upon trade. Without the

## GALLANTRY REWARDED.

Presentations to Rescuers in Youlgreave Mine Disaster.



The group shows (left to right):  
Sitting: A. Wright, Phillip Oldfield, Ernest Knight.  
Standing: A. E. Harrison, Dr. W. G. Harrison, G. Ollerenshaw.

The gallantry of seven men who played prominent parts in rescue work at the Mawstone Lead Mine disaster, Youlgreave, last May, was recognised at Bakewell Police Court on Friday, when presentations were made to them on behalf of the Carnegie Hero Fund Trust.

Eight men, three of whom were members of the rescue party, lost their lives. Four of the men, who received cheques for various amounts and honorary certificates—Messrs. Geo. Frost, Phillip Oldfield, Ernest Wright and Herbert Wright, were employed at the mine. The other three—Mr. George H. Ollerenshaw, Mr. Albert E. Harrison and Dr. William C. B. Harrison, who were not employed at the mine, but went down and took part in the rescue work, received a gold watch, a grandmother clock, and an oak bureau—each suitably inscribed, respectively.

The presentations were made by Alderman H. R. Crossland, Chairman of the Bench.

Supt. Aves said he had been requested by the Carnegie Hero Fund Trust to ask the Chairman of the Bench to make the presentations.

Alderman Crossland congratulated the men on the gallant way in which they did their duty in that disaster. He could assure them that when they who lived in the district read the accounts of the disaster in the newspapers they were deeply sorry for those who were bereaved, and at the same time they were moved by the gallant action of the rescue party. It was a very fine thing they did, when they came

forward and offered to risk their lives in an attempt to save others. It was gratifying to know that there were in the district men who would willingly come forward to try to rescue others at the risk of their own lives.

As each man came forward to receive his award, the Clerk to the Magistrates (Major H. C. Brooke Taylor) briefly explained the part he had played, and Alderman Crossland congratulated and commended each man.

Supt. Aves said that, in addition to the awards that were presented that morning, memorial certificates had been received for presentation to the relatives of the three members of the rescue party who lost their lives. Mr. K. A. Seville's widow had been awarded a pension of 10s. weekly for life, the parents of John William Birds had been awarded £50, and a pension of 12s. 6d. per week for life had been granted to the mother of Eric Evans. The certificates, at the wish of the recipients, had been, or would be, presented privately. He also stated that the Fund was making up the wages of some of the men until certain things were settled.

At the call of the Chairman, a hearty clap was accorded the recipients.

Mr. Ollerenshaw, on behalf of the recipients, expressed thanks to the Chairman for making the presentations, and the Trust for their awards. The Trust, he added, had treated them in a splendid way for the little they did in the disaster. He could assure them that they appreciated very deeply all that had been done.

### ***Gallantry Rewarded: Presentations to Rescuers in Youlgreave Mine Disaster***

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Derbyshire Times, 12th November 1932

The grandmother clock awarded to Albert Harrison stood in the Farmyard Inn until as recently as 1979, when sisters Kath and Dorothy Harrison left. The plaque on it read: 'For heroic endeavour to save human life.'

## And now...

It may have appeared to the village that the Mawstone enterprise had been respectfully interred, along with the victims. In truth, the resumption of mining operations was back on the company agenda with barely a backward glance. Mourning is brief in the boardrooms. A new manager was appointed within days, a caretaker was installed at the mine and the owners set about the business of finding the wherewithal to continue.

The years passed while the owners clung to their faith in the eldorado awaiting them in Gratton. Gold fever, it seems, infects the adventurer whatever the colour of the ore and, by 1936, the Chairman of the Company was confidently appealing for investment with the promise of rich rewards for the entrepreneur. A better-funded programme and a bolder scale of operations would surely bring this undisputed trove to certain discovery?

However, Capitalism was not impressed and nothing came of it. Perhaps the speculators had gazed into their crystal balls and seen that posterity would soon have little use for a commodity coveted since Roman times. Lead mining clung on for a while longer, but never again at Mawstone. Surface working was renewed briefly by a fluorspar merchant who brought vexatious lorry loads of mineral down Bradford to be washed at the plant, spilling rivers of slurry down the shaft and creating a new spoil heap, before leaving the mine to resume its peaceful path to dilapidation.

Hillcarr Sough has lately collapsed again and nobody seems to mind. There is no Kenneth Seville with the vision and incentive to clear it, even if this were still a desirable option, which is unlikely. The drains have backed up in the orefield, patches of land on the surface have reverted to the boggy ground they were 250 years ago and the water has risen 30 feet up the Mawstone shaft. Ironically, the water that bedevilled the miners for centuries has restored a beneficial function to the Mawstone Mine. Youlgrave Waterworks Ltd. has harnessed this inexhaustible supply to supplement the historic spring at Blackley and our gardeners can, perhaps uniquely, face the prospect of climate change with some equanimity.

But the mystery remains. Was there ever a rich body of ore beneath Gratton? Did the Youlgrave miners die in pursuit of a pipedream or were they on the brink of bringing prosperity and secure employment to the village? Unless science discovers a new uranium-like use for lead ore, the galena will lie undisturbed in the veins and scrins where it has been since time began.

And we shall never know.



*Derelict and deserted – Mawstone Mine in the mid 1970s.*





*Above: Rusting remains – the original cage, which once carried miners up and down the mineshaft at Mawstone, and a tub used to transport lead ore.  
Below: The distinctive gate to the approach track to the mine (MMY stands for ‘Mawstone Mine Youlgrave’) post-dates the 1932 disaster.*

